



Public health agency's report on asbestos due

BILLERICA — The Center for Disease Control (CDC) is expected to make a recommendation this week on the potential health hazards of the Johns-Manville asbestos dump.

Crews from CDC were in Billerica Friday surveying the 15-acre dump site located in Iron Horse Park in East Billerica.

The survey was done in conjunction with the investigation being undertaken by the Environmental Protection Agency

Billerica

(EPA) into the existence of hazardous waste in Iron Horse Park and Shaffer Landfill.

Both sites were added to the federal government's Superfund list of sites earmarked for hazardous waste cleanup this fall. EPA spokesman Richard Leighton said the CDC is expected to analyze the data and make its recommendation soon.

"The primary purpose for the CDC to come out here was to look at the Johns-Manville asbestos landfill and render an opinion to the potential degree of public health exposure," said Leighton. "Their recommendation will determine if something needs to be done immediately at the site or not."

Leighton said if the CDC finds there is a serious health hazard at the site, the EPA can move to contain the area immediately. However, if there isn't a substantial health hazard, the EPA will continue with its investigation of the site and pursue the long-term solutions to secure the asbestos landfill.

"The Legislature allows for immediate action if there is imminent public health or environmental threats," said Leighton. "We can quickly activate EPA resources to contain the threat for up to six months or by spending \$1 million, whichever is first."

The CDC was called in as the expert on asbestos-related health problems because people who inhale asbestos fibers into their lungs may develop asbesto-

sis, a potentially fatal disease of the respiratory system.

After 32 years of operation, Johns-Manville stopped using the asbestos dump in 1975 and covered it with six inches of non-asbestos material and vegetation. In 1978 it was discovered there was some erosion of that cap.

The firm reportedly fixed the areas experiencing erosion, but as recently as last fall, residents said there are exposed sites in the asbestos landfill again. The EPA and CDC have been investigating those charges.

Leighton said investigation into the other sites at Iron Horse Park, the B&M lagoons and landfill, General Latex and Chemical Corp. and a defunct Reclamation Systems Inc. landfill has been held up because of a delay in the findings of samples taken from Iron Horse Park and Shaffer Landfill in December.

Leighton said they had hoped to have the results of the test samples for hazardous waste back in early February, but so far they haven't been completed. Based on the results of the test samples, the EPA will continue its investigation for Superfund monies.

An organization called SAC (Superfund Action Committee) has been set up as the liaison for local involvement in the EPA investigation. Leighton has been meeting regularly with SAC, which lists as members residents and representatives from various town agencies.

— COULTAS

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